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To: The Education Committee and General Assembly of the Connecticut Legislature  
Date: March 6, 2016  
Re: Raised Bill: HB 5550 AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS  
TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES

I write in support of the raised bill HB 5550: An Act Concerning various revision and addition to the education statutes for Connecticut's Marriage and Family Therapists. I graduated with my Master's in Family Therapy in 2009 and then went back as a postgraduate to complete the requirements for the School Family Therapy Certificate in 2012. Following my training at Clinton Public Schools, I became the first School Family Therapist to be hired full-time in the state of Connecticut and the country, as Connecticut is the first state to provide such a certificate and opportunity. While working at The Academy of Mount Saint John, a private clinical day school for adolescent boys, I was once again reminded of the need for mental health teams in schools to support student learning. Now more than ever before that need is more clearly recognized as school violence increases.

Ten years ago, Dr. Laundry and Dr. Cohen helped enact the law to certify Marital and Family Therapists (MFTs) for school-based practice. At that time the law required MFTs to be fully licensed to obtain school certification unlike other school-based mental health groups (school counseling, psychology and social work). This standard has served as a barrier to graduating MFTs who cannot be employed by the schools where they trained.

There are six licensed mental health professions in Connecticut: Psychiatrists, APRNs, Marriage and Family Therapists, Psychologists, Social Workers, and Counselors. Marriage and Family Therapists are the **only** mental health professionals required to be licensed to work in a school system. I now co-facilitate one of the courses at Central Connecticut State University which fulfills a requirement for the certification process. When we place MFT graduate students in schools, our systems training equips us to work well with students, families, teachers and faculty alike. Building these relationships and trust take time and skillful planning. As the law is currently written, once the MFTs students complete their internships they graduate, must wait at least 12 months to obtain supervised postgraduate work experience before they are awarded their license then can apply for the State Department of Education's certificate. This means the school cannot hire an MFT upon completion of their internship, and during the time it takes for licensure to be obtained, the relationship between MFTs and the schools where they train are too often lost.

Social Workers were granted an associate licensure recently and Marriage and Family Therapists have asked for the same opportunity a couple of weeks ago (SB 68). Our hope is to allow each school the freedom to choose the mental health staff that will fully support their system. The current policy restricts MFTs from continuing their work at internship sites and creates a missed opportunity for both clinicians and clients. I urge you to remove this constraint by supporting the bill HB 5550: An Act Concerning various revision and addition to the education statutes for Connecticut's Marriage and Family Therapists.

Thank you for your time and attention,  
Jessica Joseff, LMFT